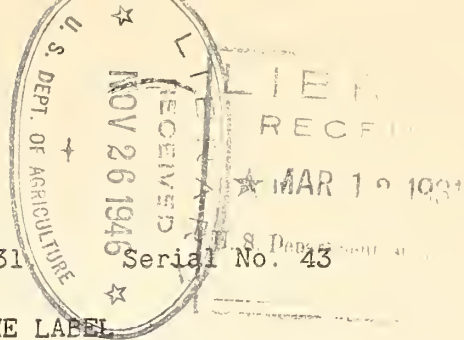


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Excerpt from a radio talk by  
W. R. M. Wharton, chief of the eastern  
district, Food and Drug Administration,  
U. S. Department of Agriculture,  
broadcast over WJZ, New York, and  
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#### HOW TO READ THE LABEL

##### Patent Medicines

The American public has been more humbugged with worthless patent medicines than in perhaps any other way. The word, "humbug," means to trick, or to deceive. Now, in view of this fact, would you suppose that a manufacturer would actually seriously use the word, "humbug," to describe a medicinal product! Well, one manufacturer did just that. She, (for the manufacturer was a woman), put on sale a product labeled, "Humbug Oil." Now, the label on this product declared it would "relieve diphtheria in its most malignant form." The only truthful statement on that label was the name, "humbug oil," for it certainly was just that.

False and fraudulent claims of medicinal, therapeutic, or curative value on a label constitute a violation of the Federal food and drugs act and the claim on this label that the humbug oil would relieve diphtheria of the most malignant type was false and fraudulent, because the humbug oil consisted only of turpentine, linseed oil, alcohol, ammonia, and very small quantities of other substances. It was valueless as a remedy for diphtheria. So a case was filed in a United States District Court against the proprietress of "Humbug Oil," alleging criminal violation of the Federal food and drugs act. When the case came up for trial, the defendant entered a plea of guilty and was fined.

It is important to know how to read labels on patent medicines. I do not wish to be understood as intending a sweeping, all-inclusive indictment of the patent-medicine business or as opposing all self-medication. There are many products which are useful as home treatments for simple ailments and as first aids. There are drugs which are palliatives and some that are useful in the relief of pain, but practically all have very decided limitations. Many are entirely worthless--- some are dangerous. I refer now to the worthless and the falsely and fraudulently labeled patent medicines. Literally, thousands of cases have been brought under the food and drugs act against patent medicines on the charge of false and fraudulent medicinal claims, and there has been a revolutionary change in the labeling of such drug products because of the enforcement of this law. One seldom sees any longer the old outlandishly false statements on the labels of medicines but not all medicine labels are yet clean of false and fraudulent statements. Great progress has been made and progress is still being made to bring such labels into strict conformity with the truth and the law, but the battle is not yet won, the job is not yet finished, for many such products are still misbranded.

Probably there will always be misbranded medicines because as soon as one product is put out of business, or the necessary label revision is secured another one springs up to take its place. Consequently, one must read medicine labels intelligently in order not to be misled. Read medicine advertisements intelligently--- otherwise one certainly will be misled.

The first difficulty in self-dosing is that self-diagnosis often is impossible, because it is based almost entirely on pure fancy. Moreover, while many drugs produce therapeutic effects, those effects are not always understood even by physicians and the effects may be different with different individuals. Hence, an average individual cannot possibly properly prescribe for himself in case of illness.

The first thing for label readers to remember is that there are very few substances known to medical science which, when properly administered, will actually cure disease. These are known as "specifics," because when properly administered according to the needs of the individual patient, they will cure the disease for which they are specific.

There seems to be a deeply rooted impression that for every physical ill there is something which, when taken into the stomach, will be a remedy. There are, or have been, variations of this notion, such as that wearing a brass ring or a piece of asafoetida or carrying a buckeye or rabbit's foot in the pocket would ward off disease. But these theories have been almost completely overshadowed by the theory that the stomach is the proper receptacle for the elixir of good health. The doctors with their bread pills are perhaps as responsible for this vast delusion as are the fright-inspiring advertisements of the nostrums. The truth is, there are few diseases for which any drug or mixture of drugs constitutes an adequate remedy. Many a doctor, if you ask him the point-blank question, will tell you so.

Notwithstanding these facts, manufacturers of quack medicines often attempt to evade the law by creating an impression in the mind of the purchaser, without making definite promises respecting the effects that their wares will produce.

Do not believe anything you see on the labels of medicines in which occur the words, "wonder worker," "magic," "certain," "infallible," "quick," "sure," "new discovery," "instant," "prompt," and "rapid." These words have often been the tools of the medicine quack, as are also the terms, "annihilator," "builder," and "killer." The word, "anti," when used in conjunction with the names of serious diseases, and the word, "food," when applied to a drug, are also pure bunk. The term, "anti," has been overworked in its use on patent medicine labels, to the confusion and detriment of the general public. We have found and seized products in which the terms, "anti-apoplectic," "anti-pneumonia," "anti-hog cholera," and many more, have been used. The terms, "brain food," "skin food," and the like are also lies, because no such things exist in the way of drug preparations.



The names of organs of the body on patent medicine labels give false impressions as to the curative value of these preparations. The buyer should not believe that any product labeled or advertised with names containing the words, "life," "lungs," "heart," "liver," "kidneys," "glands," etc., are capable of curing the diseases of these organs. The various organs of the body are subject to diseases of various kinds which demand different kinds of treatment. There is no medicine known which is a remedy, for example, for all the various diseases of the kidneys. In fact, there is no medicine which of itself constitutes an adequate treatment for any disease of the kidneys. Sometimes a medicine which might be useful in one condition of the organ would be distinctly harmful in the case of a different affection of the same organ. For example, diuretic stimulants are sometimes used in connection with the treatment of particular kidney conditions. The use of such a preparation in other diseased conditions of the kidneys would be like pouring oil on fire. Now let us take the word, "cure." This word has been used on patent medicines in connection with the name of every serious disease known to man. It is generally recognized, for example, that there is no medicine or combination of medicines which will of itself cure tuberculosis, and yet 181 different alleged tuberculosis cures have been proceeded against under the Federal food and drugs act.

During the 1928-29 influenza epidemic, hundreds of products represented in one way or another as "treatments" for influenza came on the market, and under the ban of the food and drugs act. They offered to cure and prevent influenza, notwithstanding that there is no medicine or combination of medicines known to science which will be thus effective.

So-called rheumatism "cures" have been favorites with medicine fakers for the exploitation of the public. Over 600 alleged rheumatism "cures" have been proceeded against under the food and drugs act, because they were labeled falsely and fraudulently.

The makers of fake medicines have used every method of appeal which facile minds can conceive in their efforts to have people buy their products. Labels and advertisements are cunningly fashioned to appeal to all the human instincts and emotions. They make appeal to fear, hope, pride, prejudice, social instincts, the desire to be young and beautiful, desire for marriage and business success--- indeed, to all the emotions--- but not to reason.

A favorite appeal of medicine frauds is that of promising vim, vigor, and vitality. Promises of this sort are made on preparations sold for recovery of lost manhood. All of these products are worthless, and literally scores of them have been proceeded against as fraudulent under the food and drugs act.

Fake-medicine manufacturers impose upon the credulity of human nature--- they capitalize on the hope of the sick--- they shamelessly impose upon the willingness of the average individual to believe in his

fellow men. The simple promise, "cure," which extends hope to the seriously sick, when such hope is not justified, is a cruel promise, an unconscionable promise, a shameless promise. Do fake medicine manufacturers ever appeal to reason? Not very often, and when they do their arguments are generally based on false and incomplete premises and their logic is unsound and specious.

Here are some of the expressions on which you should look with suspicion, when you find them on labels or in advertisements of patent medicines: "Don't give up hope," "The result of years of research," "Fifteen thousand doctors say," "The famous scientist, Dr. Du Doodle, says so and so," "The doctors of Europe are using it," "Five thousand dollars reward for evidence leading to the arrest of anyone for imitating," "Highly recommended by physicians," "Used by physicians everywhere," "Get well and stay well," "Remove the cause," "Eradicate the disease from the system," "Used by a physician for many years in his practice," and the like. Why is it that a manufacturer of a worthless patent medicine tells you not to give up hope? He wants you to buy his product. Why does he tell you that his product is a result of years of patient research? He wants to obtain your confidence. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred such products are not the result of any research at all. The statement, "15,000 doctors say," is meaningless, and "Dr. Du Doodle," if he exists at all, certainly is not a famous scientist. Beware of all such statements--- that is, do not let them influence you. Refuse to take them seriously. Also beware of high-sounding but tricky guarantees.

It would surprise you to know that many of the fake medicines on the market for human use are manufactured by blacksmiths, carpenters, day laborers, store-keepers. A man came recently to my office who was selling a product on the claim that it would restore lost manhood. I asked this man what his occupation was and he told me that he was an office worker and was running his medicine business on the side. I advised him frankly that his product would not do what he claimed for it, that taking money from the public for it was a fraudulent enterprise, and suggested that he get out of that business and into one which was honest and decent. He did not deny the facts on which I based the advice, but still stated he wanted to go on selling the nostrum because the returns augmented his small salary. Taking medicine from people like these is like taking stock-market tips from your garbage man.

Remember that the manufacturer of fake medicines has a selfish object in telling you that his products are efficacious. Close your minds to the influence of extravagant curative claims. Do not let the experiences of your neighbors with various medicines unduly influence you. Ask yourself, are the extravagant claims of curative value reasonable? Ask yourself what the object is, in making such claims, if it is not to cause you to buy the product and thus enrich the maker of it.